

Welcome to Reading for Well-Being within BSMHFT!



Polly Wright (on the right) and Mandy Ross of [Hearth www.thehearthcentre.org.uk](http://www.thehearthcentre.org.uk) are developing Reading for Well-Being within Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust (BSMHFT). Working within the the Recovery and Well-Being Programme, we run weekly 'read-aloud' groups on wards, clinics and activity centres around the Trust. We are also offering training for Trust staff in facilitating 'read-aloud' groups.

In the first 6 months of our project there has been a great response from patients and staff:

- *My heart is racing all the time, but here it slows down* – patient
- *I've noticed a real change in E since the reading group started – and that's really significant as she's unable to read or write* – staff

About 90 patients have attended at least one session, and we have attracted 25 regular attenders. 18 staff are now trained and setting up reading groups in their own settings.

Reading for Well-Being featured in Birmingham Post. See the link at <http://www.birminghampost.net/life-leisure-birmingham-guide/postfeatures/2009/07/29/>

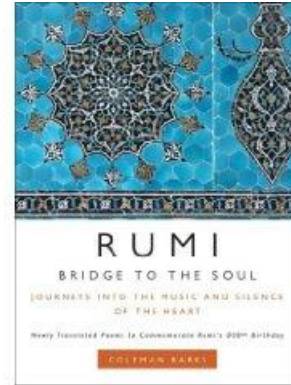
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The Hearth Centre www.thehearthcentre.org.uk

Our method



Our reading groups are facilitator-led, working with patients and staff of BSMHFT. We meet weekly to read aloud from works which we consider to have literary value and which can promote meaningful discussion.

The facilitator reads aloud from novels, stories and poems, while participants follow from photocopies or books (or just listen if they prefer). We pause every so often for discussion and reflection, encouraging participants (patients and staff) to respond to the text and how it connects with their experience.

Participants can share in the reading aloud, but only if they wish to. Sometimes we might offer a creative writing exercise in response to a text. Groups usually last about an hour to 90mins.

We are building on the work of Jane Davis and Get Into Reading. Read more about their work at

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/jan/05/fiction.scienceandnature>

Both Polly Wright and Mandy Ross are accredited facilitators with Get Into Reading.

Early comments on evaluation forms and interviews include:

Patients

My heart is racing all the time, but here it slows down

I feel better when I try and concentrate

I see this group as part of my treatment. I stay at home all day and could be Miss Havisham

I was going shopping, but this is much better than shopping – it's cleared my head.

It's so important to have something to get up for. It structures your day.

Staff

I've noticed a real change in E since the reading group started – and that's really significant as she's unable to read or write

This session is far more popular than we anticipated

The attendance has doubled since you started

The patients are really enjoying it

Staff fight over who will join the group each week

Lyndon Day Hospital

The reading group at Lyndon Day Hospital has been running successfully since its very first session in September 2009. The group is run by Polly Wright and she is joined by various members of staff on a weekly basis. Group numbers have reached 14, and there is a core group of 10 participants who attend regularly.

At first we started with short stories, such as *The Necklace* by Guy de Maupassant, and *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman – and poetry including *Mirror* by Sylvia Plath and *Ode to Autumn* by Keats – but we quickly moved on to extracts from *Great Expectations* and other Victorian novels. The group expressed a strong interest in Charles Dickens, which led to the selection of *Girl in a Blue Dress* by Gaynor Arnold. The novel tells the story of a couple who strongly resemble Dickens and his wife, Catherine, and depicts the breakdown of their marriage from the wife's point of view.



Gaynor Arnold is a local author, and the book is published by the local Tindal St Press. We bought discounted books from the local Press and arranged a visit from the author before Christmas. The group hugely enjoyed Gaynor's visit, and have since followed every detail of the book's success in the press. *Girl in a Blue Dress* has won many awards and was longlisted for the Booker Prize. Since then we have read about a chapter a week, and are now halfway through the book. We don't allow anyone to read on, as the point of the approach is to share the text together.

We start the session with a poem every week, and our choice has ranged widely from Shakespeare to nonsense verse. The group particularly enjoy humorous pieces, such as *When I grow old I shall wear purple* and *The Owl and the Pussy Cat*. Creative writing exercises are regularly used to encourage identification and deepen understanding of the poetry. The creative writing exercises often stimulate profound reflection on their lives, which are then explored in therapy sessions.

A recent evaluation of the Reading group by Canterbury Christchurch University elicited the following comments:

"I like being free to talk, sharing experiences. It's structured, we know what we are doing. B. went on to say that the structure was really important for people who are depressed because "we don't know what we want to do today."

*“Poetry. I like the way we talk about and analyse meaning. It gives me some intellectual stimulation. The other groups don’t give the same stimulation.”
Reading aloud helps me absorb story more, allows images to...create a spark, makes us more animated.”*

“It relaxes me. It also made me want to learn more. “

“The facilitator has brought normality into here. The reading aloud group has given us the chance to talk about issues that we may not otherwise talk about.”

“I like the discussion and sharing experiences.”

“It’s increased my confidence, pushing my boundaries. Depression makes your world small and this has opened my world out again.”

“It started me writing about my own life.”

“After about session 4 I felt able to contribute. It helped me with my confidence.”

“It stimulates me intellectually.”

“The facilitator’s reading style brings it to life.”

“Reading a book together brings the story alive.”

“It’s provoked me to read more.”

“It’s given me confidence.”

“It makes you realise that you are not alone...shows me that there are things out there. I need to be stretched.”

Discussions are underway at Lyndon to transfer the group from a room at the hospital to a room in a local library, to promote recovery and community engagement. The manager of Lyndon and Polly Wright are currently considering the most effective and sensitive way of achieving this.

The Zinnia Centre

We started our work in Zinnia on the acute wards, and with the help of Activity Worker Martin Woodhall, we raised some interest in reading and creative writing from a few in-patients. After some lively sessions, we moved the group to Zinnia’s activity centre, the Venue, where we were joined by out-patients.

We now have a thriving workshop called Off the Page every Friday afternoon, where we combine reading approaches with creative writing. Visual art and music have also been used as a stimulus. We are currently reading Things Fall

Apart by Chinua Achebe, which the patients find challenging – but very enjoyable and thought provoking.

Another significant development in the Zinnia group is that we have written a structure for a play and are approaching the Trust to raise money to stage it in the Venue's excellent performing facilities.

Cilantro (eating disorders ward) and Oleaster Venue reading groups

Patients in reading groups on Cilantro ward, in Barberry Hospital, and in the Oleaster Venue activity centre have been suggesting and requesting favourite poems and stories including *My Last Duchess* by Robert Browning, one of Alan Bennett's *Talking Heads* monologues, and poetry by Robert Frost. Creative writing has become a popular feature.

The groups have changed and evolved over time, for instance moving from the Common Room onto Cilantro ward, and choosing material that best suits different patients' needs.

The Cilantro (eating disorders) ward group has taken some time to build up trust among patients, but has gradually become part of the ward culture.

Participants' comments include:

- *It gives you insight, puzzling the poem apart, and it teaches you something. I enjoy the process.*
- *I forget my depression when I'm absorbed, when I'm here at the reading group. Writing lets things out. The more you hold it in, the more you act like an idiot.*
- *It's something calm to focus your head on when there's so much else going on. The group has helped me learn to talk about things. I wouldn't have known I could talk like this to the nurse otherwise.*

Chamomile reading group: mother and babies reading together



The reading group on Chamomile mother and baby ward, run by Mandy Ross and OT Clare Hooper, has become popular and well-established. Participants say:

The reading group is good. It brings everyone together to hear a story. I feel different afterwards – it's relaxing, it's interesting. I don't mind when we do hard poems, like Shakespeare. I'm interested to work out what it means

The reading group cheers you up. If you feel down before the group it lifts your mood. I've just bought a yearbook for my son with a story for each day of the year. It reminded me of stories when I was a child. I wouldn't have thought of it otherwise. When you've had depression and haven't been communicating, it's easier to interact [with my baby] by reading than by talking

Chamomile reading group sessions begin with mums sharing books with their babies. Ladybird Books has sent baby books for reading on the ward, while Bookstart has sent boxes of books for parents to keep and take home. Fresh new books have given a sense of enthusiasm for reading with the babies. Books of familiar nursery rhymes have proved especially popular.

'I don't know how to hold my baby and hold a book at the same time,' said one mum at the first reading group session. But since then everyone has grown more familiar and comfortable with the process.

After 15 minutes of sharing books with the babies, the focus shifts to reading from literature, often on themes of childhood. We have read Shakespeare sonnets, Greek myths and Grimm's tales alongside re-workings by Roald Dahl, Greek myths, an Anansi story, Sylvia Plath, Carol Ann Duffy, as well as poetry in translation from Farsi and Urdu, reflecting participants' first languages.

Clare Hooper, Chamomile's OT, writes: The group has quickly become part of the ward's culture. It is eagerly anticipated by some of the women, and has built rapport between patients and staff. I have been surprised at how well individuals have participated, including some who failed to engage in other therapeutic activities. Some women who I thought under-confident have volunteered unprompted to read aloud. This has visibly boosted their confidence and self-esteem.

Initially I expected to focus on reading children's books together. But I've seen that encouraging women to read a wide range of poetry and prose – often containing difficult language and complex ideas – has boosted their confidence in reading. I guess they concluded, 'If I can read a Shakespeare sonnet I can certainly read a baby's story book!'

Training with Reading for Well-Being



Participants working together on a text during a recent Reading for Well-Being training session

We run a training course of six half-day sessions. The course covers choosing material, reading aloud, what makes a good facilitator, preparing for a session and keeping a log. During the course, participants will have the chance to experiment with facilitating a reading group session with material of their choice. By the end of the course they will have gathered a resource bank of tried and tested stories and poems for use in reading groups, plus ideas about finding and choosing more.

Participants on the first course said:

- Comprehensive, well-structured course
- I very much appreciate all of the wonderful reading material...
- All expectations exceeded... I feel inspired and supported to set up a reading group. Excellent!

The second Reading for Well-Being training course runs from March 2010.

We hope to add a forum on the Trust intranet for training participants to exchange ideas and information about reading groups as they develop.

Reading for Well-Being with deaf patients

An initial taster session with deaf service-users at the Barberry hospital (both day-patients and in-patients) went so well that patients have requested a regular reading group. Working through a sign-language interpreter as well as a relay interpreter, we experimented to find the best kind of material and the best way to convey and discuss it.

All the participants (and staff too!) contributed to lively and animated discussion, offering varied opinions raised by the story and poem, discussing what they would have done in the same situation, asking questions and responding to each others' comments. There was useful discussion too about where participants get stories – some talked about soap operas and television drama and films, others read books and newspapers.

All the participants said they had enjoyed the session; one patient said 'Marvellous! I liked that!' There was a clear preference for the story rather than the poem, but we will continue to experiment to see what works best.

Some of our favourite poems...

...for using in reading groups. Why not take a moment to read them aloud with a patient or colleague?

The Lake Isle of Innisfree by William Butler Yeats 1865-1939

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;
Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

Daffodils by William Wordsworth

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced, but they
Out-did the sparkling leaves in glee;
A poet could not be but gay,
In such a jocund company!
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

And a few others to look out for:

The Flower by George Herbert

The Embryo by Rumi

Ode to Autumn by Keats

Shakespearian sonnets numbers 29 and 116

The Hunchback in the Park by Dylan Thomas

When I grow old and start to wear purple by Jenny Joseph

Mirror by Sylvia Plath

Miracle on St David's Day by Gillian Clarke

Creative writing in reading groups

Reading for Well-Being often uses creative writing inspired by poems or stories we've been reading. This can help to create a deeper engagement with the text, as well as giving a sense of achievement when the patient has finished a piece of work – and sometimes reads it aloud to the group.

We are working with Nine Arches Press, a local publisher, to publish a pamphlet of patients' work alongside the poems that have inspired them. Watch this space!

Here is a poem written by Christopher Smart in the 18th century, and below, a poem inspired by it.

From *My Cat, Jeoffrey* by CHRISTOPHER SMART 1722-1771

For I will consider my Cat Jeoffry.
For he is the servant of the Living God, duly and daily serving him.
For at the first glance of the glory of God in the East he worships in his way.
For is this done by wreathing his body seven times round with elegant quickness.
For then he leaps up to catch the musk, which is the blessing of God upon his prayer.
For he rolls upon prank to work it in.
For having done duty and received blessing he begins to consider himself.
For this he performs in ten degrees.
For first he looks upon his forepaws to see if they are clean.
For secondly he kicks up behind to clear away there.
For thirdly he works it upon stretch with the forepaws extended.
For fourthly he sharpens his paws by wood.
For fifthly he washes himself.
For sixthly he rolls upon wash.
For seventhly he fleas himself, that he may not be interrupted upon the beat.
For eighthly he rubs himself against a post.
For ninthly he looks up for his instructions.
For tenthly he goes in quest of food.
For having considered God and himself he will consider his neighbor.
For if he meets another cat he will kiss her in kindness.
For when he takes his prey he plays with it to give it a chance.
For one mouse in seven escapes by his dallying.

Remembering Beryl by Jimmy
After *My Cat, Jeoffrey* by Christopher Smart

I remember Beryl
because she loved cats,
because her husband loved cats,
because it was their family tradition,
because the cat brought in a pigeon once and a man had to come and catch it,

because she worked in the factory at Longbridge,
because her second husband, Alf, also worked at Longbridge,
because her first husband used to play the organ at Greenlands Social Club,

because she gave up smoking,
because she liked the bingo,
because she spent £20 a week on the lottery,
because she roasted belly draft for dinner and it lasted for two days,
because she loved the garden and her brother helped her grow flowers
because her husband worked at the fish and chip shop and fetched me chips,
because she lived next door to us,
because when she went on holiday to Greece or Australia we used to look after
the cats,
because the cat's favourite present was fish
because it went into the garden behind and caught a fish in the pond,
because we had a key to the house and when she went to hospital my dad
looked after the house,
because she died of a strangled hernia
because I went to her funeral.

Working with Sylvia Plath

Click this link to read 'Mirror', a poem by Sylvia Plath, which inspired the poem below. <http://vmlinux.org/ilse/lit/plath.htm>

After Sylvia Plath

Participants were asked to write from the point of view of an inanimate object.

Bed

I came to you big and bold.
Oh how you loved me!
Happy times- nor tears at bedtime.
Soft and comfortable you wrapped yourself in my comfort.

You whispered your secrets to me every night
Then slept in my warmth, safe and sound.

Now things have changed.
Now you don't sleep in my comfort
Don't wrap yourself in my comfort.
You toss and turn and cry,
You don't tell me, but I know, bad thoughts attack you.

I wish I could whisper to you not to worry,
Not to cry.
Wrap yourself in my comfort,
Rock in my comfort.